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ABSTRACT

There is evidence of a growing trend toward ticket splitting, or independent voting patterns in all U.S. elections, especially in recent years. Independence of the electorate in 1972 was visible in the large Republican vote for President, during substantial voting for Democrats in Congress, and in gubernatorial elections. Analysis of mass media variables and the electorate in general leads to the conclusion that the DeVries and Tarrance testing model is unconfirmed. Researchers who posit a correspondence between perceptually derived data on mass media influence and ticket splitting have yet to support that position convincingly. (CH)

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MASS COMMUNICATION AND TICKET SPLITTING IN THE 1972 GENERAL ELECTION

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Almost everyone who holds an opinion on the subject agrees that one of the most significant political trends of the 1960's and early 1970's was the dramatic decline in the power of political party affiliation as a predictor of voting behavior. The percentage of voters who perceive themselves as independent and/or split their tickets has grown to the point that in the vast majority of sizable voting units across the country, they hold the balance of power.

The 1972 general election results indicate clearly the growing "independence" of the electorate (8). Although a Republican President was elected by one of the largest landslides in American history, both houses of the U.S. Congress remained Democratic. Across the country Republican senatorial and gubernatorial candidates who expected a ride to victory on the President's coat tails were disappointed on election day, as were countless state legislative candidates who were defeated while gubernatorial candidates of their party were elected. This trend may become even more pronounced with the reduction of the voting age to 18. Although the data analyzed in this paper do not address this issue, 18-21 year olds profess party allegiance at a rate below any other age group. In any case, the trend away from strict adherence to political

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party preference as a guide to voting behavior continues unabated.

Although there have been several attempts to explain the switchers (7), floating voters (3), and perceptual independents (2), the most recent, and by far the most provocative, for communication scholars, is the political decision making model posited by DeVries and Tarrance (4) in their recent book, The Ticket Splitter: A New Force in American Politics. The book is a strong reaction to the traditional methodologies which have been used to define and explain political independence. The basic contention of the book is that the only defensible definition of independence is based upon behavioral, rather than perceptual data. The authors reason that if one allows voters to define their political party affiliation and the strength of that affiliation via self reports, a very different picture emerges than when one elicits self reports of actual voting behavior as a basis for determining the influence of party preference. This contention is supported by descriptive data from which the authors construct their conceptual model.

Contrary to traditional analysis of political independence, especially that of the Survey Research Center as reported in The American Voter (2), DeVries and Tarrance discount the role of political parties contending that

> . . . in the survey studies that we have conducted or reviewed over the last several elections, the dominance of party identification has evaporated. Today when people are asked how they make up their minds about a candidate,

> they discuss his general ability, his personality, his ability to handle the job, his stand on the issues, and so on. This is especially true for the split-ticket voter" (4, p. 74).

Of special interest to the communications researcher is the influence which DeVries and Tarrance grant to mass media:

> Many voters - principally the ticket splitters . . . draw issues from the media (principally television) and interpersonal relationships (family and friends). Ticket-splitters do not rely on political parties or their group affiliations - they rely on the news media for their information about politics and government (4, p. 115).

DeVries and Tarrance conclude that because ticket splitters make voting decisions based heavily upon information about the candidate and the issues, are high consumers of media output, grant high credibility to the mass media, especially television, and perceive media contacts as being influential, the media do, in fact, have a strong direct effect on ticket splitting behavior. We have several responses to this line of reasoning and to the data upon which it is based.

First, it is ironic to us that DeVries and Tarrance would make the same error which they ascribe to the authors of The American Voter (2). Their major complaint with the approach taken by the Survey Research Center is that they allowed voters to describe their party allegiance and to report on their perceptions of the strength of that allegiance without overt behavioral validation. This dependence upon a perceptual operational definition of the variable, rather than a behavioral operational definition led the SRC to draw, say DeVries and Tarrance, erroneous and rather valueless inferences regarding

who independents are and how they are likely to behave. However, DeVries and Tarrance accept without question a 1970 election survey conducted in Michigan in which voters were asked to review a list of thirty-five variables that might have some influence on the way they made up their minds on political matters (4, p. 75). Respondents rated each of the 35 variables on an eleven-point scale indicating the degree of influence each had. Because nine of the 12 variables which received ratings of 5.0 or more were mass media variables, the authors conclude that these are indeed the most important influences on ticket-splitting behavior and proceed to construct a model based upon this conclusion. In other words, to DeVries and Tarrance, perceived influence equals real influence. This logic, we believe, contains the same essential flaw as does much of the perceptual data produced over the past 15 years by the Survey Research Center. Voters may be able to make perceptual distinctions which have little or no impact on their overt behavior.

Second, every conclusion upon which the DeVries and Tarrance model is based was drawn without benefit of a single test of statistical significance. All conclusions are based upon purely descriptive data. This serious omission is, however, consistent with the major purpose of the book. As the authors indicate, "The purpose of this book is to describe and thereby understand a phenomenon (ticket-splitting) which has had a profound effect on American political life during

the 1960's" (4, p. 113). We contend, that while description may be the beginning of understanding, it can be greatly aided by the application of inferential statistics, a premise which we hope to support later in this paper.

At another point, DeVries and Tarrance make explicit their attitude toward some of the analytic techniques used in this paper when they say that the

> . . . book is meant to be neither a rigid technical document with correlation coefficients and multiple regressions nor a journalistic polemic with no hard data and consideration of campaign realities. It is intended to be a conceptualizing document about a new group of independent voters who, we believe, hold the balance of power in American politics. (4, p. 38)

We don't mean to be unduly contentious, and perhaps we are showing our academic bias, but we firmly believe that DeVries and Tarrance have drawn a false dichotomy. There are several reasonable alternatives to their approach, none of which are rigidly technical nor unrealistic. In fact, we contend that if one is going to assume correspondence between perceived media influence and "real" media influence on voting behavior, one must, in order to avoid unrealistic conceptualizing, test the nature and degree of that correspondence.

Third, we doubt the viability of most media variables as predictors of differential voting behavior because, in general, previous studies (5, 9, 10) which have employed multivariate statistics show no such direct effects and because of the pervasive nature of the media, particularly television and newspapers, in society.

Thus, for these reasons, the research reported in this paper was designed as a partial test of the political decision making model outlined by DeVries and Tarrance. Specifically, we sought to test the following hypothesis:

> When political affiliation, strength of political affiliation, and place of residence are held constant, mass media variables account for significant proportions of variance in ticket splitting behavior.

METHODS

Data were collected via personal interview from 247 registered voters in three rural Southern Illinois counties and from 172 registered voters in suburban St. Louis County, Missouri, during the two-week period just prior to the 1972 general election. Thirty-one Southern Illinois and 23 St. Louis County respondents were dropped from this analysis because of missing data. Thus we have 365 cases analyzed in this report.

In Southern Illinois, 77 of the respondents were registered voters who had participated in a similar study of the 1972 Illinois primary elections and who had been chosen at random from affidavits filed at the time they received their ballots to vote in the primary. The remainder of the Southern Illinois respondents were chosen at random from current registered voters lists in the three counties.

In St. Louis County, Missouri, which includes much of the suburban area around the city of St. Louis, but not the

city proper, a block sampling technique was utilized. Census blocks were drawn at random and interviewers were given a specified number of interviews to complete within each census block.

Interviewers were graduate and undergraduate students enrolled in Communications and Government courses at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and at St. Louis University. All interviewers had participated in at least two training sessions and had gathered practice interviews in the field before gathering data for this study.

The interview schedule was pretested and revised before data collection began. It took from 30 minutes to one and one-half hours to administer, depending upon the sophistication of the interviewer and interviewee. Following a series of questions on media use, perceived media credibility, perceived media influence, perception of candidates and issues, and political attitudes, respondents completed a "secret" ballot in which they could vote for the top six political offices in their state's election.

Discriminant analysis (6) was used to determine if communication variables (amount of information from various sources, kind of information - candidate or issue, primary source of information, media credibility, perceived source influence, information seeking) would account for significant proportions of variance for either of two ticket splitting criterion scores. Self-designated party preference, strength of political affiliation, and location of residence were used

as covariates to hold constant the effects of those variables and give a more precise test of the effects of the communication variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the hypothesis that when political affiliation, strength of political affiliation, and place of residence are held constant, mass media variables account for significant proportions of variance in ticket splitting behavior, we applied regression techniques to the data obtained from the seven questions in the survey which were most relevant to the model.

As Table I indicates, of the 365 respondents in the study, 85 (23.29%) were self designated Republicans, 167 (47.75%) were self designated Democrats, and 113 (30.96%) were self designated Independents. This pattern is generally consistent with the results reported by DeVries and Tarrance, as are the number of ticket splitters from each of the affiliations. The DeVries and Tarrance data show that, in general, one can expect a relatively small percentage of ticket splitters among Republicans, a somewhat larger percentage among Democrats, and a still larger percentage among Independents. Although this general pattern held true for both of our operational definitions of the dependent variable, only two significant differences emerged. The proportion of

splitters among Republicans was significantly smaller than for Democrats or Independents when we defined splitting as a split between President and Governor. When we defined a split as any change of party so long as the respondent voted in at least three contested races, Independents split in a significantly larger proportion of cases than did Republicans or Democrats (1).

It should also be noted from Table I that the two operational definitions of the criterion variable produce very different results. The more liberal definition of one split in at least three votes produces a far higher number of splitters.

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSES

None of the analyses attempting to account for significant proportions of variance in ticket splitting between President and Governor isolated communication variables contributing significant proportions of unique variance. For this one definition of "ticket splitter" we may therefore reject the hypothesis that communication variables are major contributors to ticket splitting behavior within the context of our approach.

Since one of the most clearly asserted propositions in the DeVries and Tarrance conceptual model is that information about the candidates and about their positions on the issues are important ingredients in the ticket splitter's decision making process, and since there is no generally accepted and

applied definition of "ticket splitter" the second set of discriminant analyses seemed warranted. The results of the analyses provide little support for the conceptual model's propositions since only one variable in each of three of the seven models tested contributed significant proportions of unique variance. These models and the questions employed are given in Tables II, III, and IV and the zero-order correlations among the variables are given in Tables V, VI, and VII.

The data in Table II show that the only information variable for which the proportion of variance was significant was candidates' political background, and this was only 1.38 per cent (11). The full statistical model accounted for 16.38 per cent of the total variance. Campaign issues failed to account for a significant proportion of ticket splitting behavior although the DeVries and Tarrance conceptual model would lead us to expect issues would be a major contributor to variance accounted for. Political affiliation and strength of political affiliation were significant predictors accounting for 9.03 per cent and 6.82 per cent respectively of the variance in ticket splitting (12).

Table III exhibits a similar configuration for the source believability question. While the full statistical model accounts for 21.62 per cent of total variance, the only communication variable that accounts for a small, but significant, proportion of variance is believability of radio information, 2.43 per cent.

This finding is inconsistent with the DeVries and Tarrance model which posits that television, newspapers, and interpersonal communication are more believable and thus more likely to influence behavior of the ticket splitter. We do find that a majority of all respondents, 52.6 per cent, do attribute greater believability to television than to any other medium, but it is believability of information obtained from radio, not television, that discriminates the ticket splitter from the straight ticket voter. Again the party subset and strength of political affiliation variables account for more variance than do any of the source believability variables (8.53 and 6.38 per cent respectively).

As with the other communication variables, perceived sources of influence contributed little to our ability to predict ticket splitting behavior. As shown in Table IV, only one source, news magazines, accounts for a significant proportion of variance, 1.27 per cent, while the party and strength of political affiliation variables account for 7.97 and 6.74 per cent of the variance respectively. Total variance accounted for by all predictors was 21.42 per cent.

Overall then, we find only the variables of (1) candidate political background, (2) believability of radio information, and (3) influence of news magazines accounting for significant proportions of variance in ticket splitting behavior when party and strength of political affiliation are held constant. And, these proportions, five points or

less, are so small as to be virtually meaningless.

Further, none of the communication variables in the discriminant models analyzing (1) amount of information obtained from each source, (2) the single most believable medium for political information, (3) the primary source of information about the campaign, and (4) perceived usefulness of various sources when a voter is seeking information about the campaign accounted for significant proportions of variance in ticket splitting.

In general, our multi-variate data analyses overwhelmingly disconfirm the hypothesis generated out of the DeVries and Tarrance model. In four of the 14 regression models we tested, no communications variables accounted for significant variance. In the three reported above, only three scattered communication variables accounted for variance, and in one of these instances, it (news magazines) would not have been predicted by the DeVries and Tarrance model as significant. We, therefore, reject the hypothesis with which we began this study and conclude that those who posit a correspondence between perceptually derived data on mass media influence and ticket splitting have yet to support convincingly their position. Moreover, we would urge great caution in the drawing of generalizations about political campaign strategies based upon the DeVries and Tarrance model until a more persuasive case for its viability has been presented.

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11. The proportions of variance given in Tables II, III, and IV are the unique variance accounted for by each variable with all others held constant. Thus, the variance accounted for by the predictors individually will not necessarily add up to the proportion accounted for by the entire model with all variables operating in conjunction due to intercorrelations among the predictors.

12. Perceived political affiliation was determined by answers to the standard Survey Research Center question: "Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?" Respondents were then asked to indicate the strength of their affiliation on a scale ranging from one (weak) to seven (strong). These questions are the bases for the data on political affiliation and strength of affiliation reported throughout this paper.

TABLE I

NUMBER OF TICKET SPLITTERS BY PARTY DESIGNATION

	Total Respondents	Ticket Splitters	Per cent Split
	Split President/Governor		
Republicans	85	12	14.12*
Democrats	167	44	26.35
Independents	113	42	37.17
	Split One of Three Votes		
Republicans	85	45	52.94
Democrats	167	105	62.87
Independents	113	97	85.84**

*Proportion is significantly smaller than for Democrats and Independents.

**Proportion is significantly larger than for Republicans and Democrats.

TABLE II

PROPORTIONS OF VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR IN TICKET SPLITTING BY TYPES OF INFORMATION RESPONDENT PERCEIVED RECEIVING

Variable	Variance	p-value less than	Correlation*
FULL MODEL	.1638	.0001	
Candidate personal lives	.0000	n.s.	-.01
Campaign issues	.0000	n.s.	.02
Candidate personal character	.0013	n.s.	-.02
Candidate political background	.0138	.05	.13
Republican			-.17
Democrat			-.09
Independent			.26
Party subset	.0903**	.0001	
Strength of political affiliation	.0682	.0001	-.22
Southern Illinois residence	.0016	n.s.	-.03

*Zero-order correlation between predictor and criterion variables.

**Variance accounted for by the swarm of points for all three categorical political predictor variables.

The question was: Generally, how much information do you feel you have been getting about each of the following: (see options in Table II above). Respondents rated each option on a Likert-type scale from one, indicating "none," to five, indicating "a great deal."

TABLE III

PROPORTIONS OF VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR IN TICKET SPLITTING BY PERCEIVED BELIEVABILITY OF INFORMATION FROM EACH SOURCE

Variable	Variance	p-value less than	Correlation*
FULL MODEL	.2162	.0001	
Other people	.0007	n.s.	-.04
Television	.0011	n.s.	.03
Newspapers	.0004	n.s.	.12
Magazines	.0080	n.s.	.18
Political mailings	.0036	n.s.	-.08
Radio	.0243	.01	.18
Telephone messages	.0074	n.s.	-.10
Republican			-.17
Democrat			-.09
Independent			.26
Party Subset	.0853**	.0001	
Strength of political affiliation	.0638	.0001	-.22
Southern Illinois residence	.0011	n.s.	-.03

*Zero-order correlation between predictor and criterion variables.

**Variance accounted for by the swarm of points for all three categorical political predictor variables.

The question was: I would now like to ask you how believable you feel the information you are getting about the election is. Using the 5-point scale at the bottom of the card, tell me how believable the information you are getting is from each of the sources ranging from not at all believable (score=1) to very believable (score=5)?

TABLE IV

PROPORTIONS OF VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR IN TICKET SPLITTING BY PERCEIVED SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

Variable	Variance	p-value less than	Correlation*
FULL MODEL	.2142	.0001	
Friends	.0022	n.s.	.08
Relatives	.0000	n.s.	.02
Newspapers	.0000	n.s.	.13
News magazines	.0127	.025	.23
Radio news	.0035	n.s.	.19
Television news	.0044	n.s.	.11
Campaign workers	.0005	n.s.	-.00
Campaign literature	.0001	n.s.	-.02
Candidates	.0000	n.s.	.09
Television advertising	.0045	n.s.	-.02
Radio advertising	.0014	n.s.	.08
Public officials	.0002	n.s.	.04
Husband/Wife	.0038	n.s.	.08
Republican			-.17
Democrat			-.09
Independent			.26
Party subset	.0797**	.0001	
Strength of political affiliation	.0674	.0001	-.22
Southern Illinois residence	.0013	n.s.	-.03

*Zero-order correlation between predictor and criterion variables.

**Variance accounted for by the swarm of points for all three categorical political predictor variables.

The question was: Generally, how much do you think your opinions about the candidates and the issues have been influenced this year by each of these sources of information? Respondents rated each source from one (no influence) to 5 (a lot of influence).

TABLE V

CORRELATIONS* AMONG PREDICTOR VARIABLES: TYPES OF INFORMATION

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.	Candidates' Personal Lives	1.0	20	36	29	06	-02	-03	05	-08
2.	Campaign Issues		1.0	28	38	03	-03	-00	02	00
3.	Candidates' Personal Character			1.0	36	-03	02	-01	08	-02
4.	Candidates' Political Background				1.0	06	-01	-01	-03	00
5.	Republican					1.0	-51	-37	-08	10
6.	Democrat						1.0	-62	-07	01
7.	Independent							1.0	16	-11
8.	Strength of Political Affiliation								1.0	-19
9.	Southern Illinois Residence									1.0

*Correlations of .24 or more are significantly greater than zero. Decimals omitted for off diagonal elements.

TABLE VI

CORRELATIONS* AMONG PREDICTOR VARIABLES: BELIEVABILITY OF INFORMATION FROM SOURCES

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Other people	1.0	18	03	04	16	13	18	-09	05	-09	09	-01
2. Television		1.0	48	32	23	36	11	-00	08	-02	-01	08
3. Newspapers			1.0	56	21	40	09	02	00	09	-02	-01
4. Magazines				1.0	27	45	20	01	-09	-03	-01	-04
5. Political mailings					1.0	26	5i	02	01	00	09	-12
6. Radio						1.0	24	09	-08	-03	-01	-02
7. Telephone messages							1.0	06	-02	07	03	05
8. Republican								1.0	-51	-37	-08	10
9. Democrat									1.0	-62	07	01
10. Independent										1.0	16	-11
11. Strength of political affiliation											1.0	-19
12. Southern Illinois residence												1.0

*Correlations .24 or more are significantly greater than zero. Decimals omitted for off diagonal elements.

TABLE VII

CORRELATIONS AMONG PREDICTOR VARIABLES: PERCEIVED SOURCES OF INFLUENCE

	Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1.	Friends	1.0	43	15	11	15	22	31	24	16	22	16	20	10	-05	08	-04	-01	-06
2.	Relatives		1.0	16	09	03	13	24	21	03	21	12	21	14	-00	07	-08	-01	-06
3.	Newspapers			1.0	54	29	32	15	18	24	11	11	19	08	01	-03	03	00	-10
4.	News magazines				1.0	29	21	18	15	28	-00	06	19	12	-07	-03	10	-02	03
5.	Radio news					1.0	31	15	12	18	13	52	19	08	-03	00	04	-02	-12
6.	Television news						1.0	18	24	29	50	25	18	16	-02	04	-03	-02	05
7.	Campaign workers							1.0	58	26	29	25	36	07	-04	07	-03	07	-06
8.	Campaign literature								1.0	30	40	30	39	12	03	07	-09	02	-03
9.	Candidates									1.0	27	17	36	09	-03	-04	07	-00	-08
10.	TV advertising										1.0	54	24	12	01	01	-02	00	-08
11.	Radio advertising											1.0	28	09	-01	-02	03	03	-15
12.	Public officials												1.0	16	04	-05	02	-01	-04
13.	Husband/wife													1.0	09	-07	-01	01	-00
14.	Republicans														1.0	-51	-37	-08	10
15.	Democrat															1.0	-62	-07	01
16.	Independent																1.0	16	-11
17.	Strength of political affiliation																	1.0	-19
18.	Southern Illinois residence																		1.0

*Correlations of .24 or more are significantly greater than zero. Decimals omitted for off diagonal elements.